



Regional Workgroup
Coahuila-Nuevo León-Tamaulipas-Texas
(Four-State Regional Workgroup)

Meeting of the Amistad Task Force

Date: Wednesday, March 9, 2016
Time: 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm

International Center for Trade
3295 Bob Rogers Dr.
Eagle Pass, TX 78840

Minutes

Summary of Participants: There were about 40 people at the event in Eagle Pass. These attendees included officials from the city of Eagle Pass, Departamento de Ecología de Piedras Negras, SIMAS Piedras Negras, Departamento de Ecología de Ciudad Acuña, Nava, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 El Paso office, Secretariat of Environment in Coahuila (SEMACE), Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC), Mexican Consulate in Eagle Pass, Kickapoo Tribe of Texas, non-profit organizations and academic institutions, and TCEQ Border Affairs staff in Austin (by phone).

Victor Wong (TCEQ) thanked the city of Eagle Pass for hosting the event and the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) for interpretation services.

Eagle Pass Mayor Ramsey English Cantu issued welcoming remarks. He praised the work at the local, state and federal level to address environmental issues and encouraged communities to participate in the Border 2020 process.

Hector Chavez (City Manager of Eagle Pass) underscored the importance of enhancing binational collaboration to address environmental challenges in our communities.

Dr. Carlos Rincon (Director of the EPA Region 6—El Paso) acknowledged the participation of the Secretariat of Environment in Coahuila in Border 2020. Rincon encouraged stakeholders to refine projects in the action plan.

Biol. Eglantina Canales (Director of the Secretariat of Environment in Coahuila) described the collaboration with program partners as a rewarding experience for Coahuila officials.

Canales underscored the importance of implementing binational strategies to address environmental priorities. The border area in Coahuila faces challenges due to future population growth, increasing demand for water services, improving air quality and developing sustainable waste tools for residents. Border 2020 serves as a forum to share our experiences and best practices that enable us to address environmental matters.

Jesus Flores de la Garza (Director of Ecology in Nava), Alfredo Lucero (Director of Ecology in Piedras Negras), and Carlos Flores (Director of Ecology in Acuña) issued remarks on behalf of their respective mayors.

Juan Gabriel Garza (Mayor of Morelos) stressed the need to promote environmental awareness and continue developing infrastructure to address our future needs.

Alejandra Carrera Maynez (Director of Conservation of the Secretariat of the Environment in Coahuila) discussed the Arroyo Las Vacas project under the Border 2020 Program.

The Arroyo Las Vacas is a tributary of the Rio Grande. There was little data on the condition of the arroyo. The Secretariat of the Environment in Coahuila partnered with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), International Boundary Water Commission (IBWC), Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas (CILA), Ciudad Acuña, the Technological Institute of Acuña (ITSA), and other entities to conduct an assessment on the water quality and ecological conditions of Arroyo Las Vacas.

Staff conducted an evaluation of five sections of Arroyo Las Vacas. Results showed that the water quality of the arroyo is good when it crosses Ciudad Acuña, but not in rural areas.

A geographical database containing 12 routes was set up in Google Maps. This data identifies areas of concern and areas of environmental richness within the creek. Any resident can access the database. It is useful to make decisions on improving the conditions of the arroyo.

SEMAC identified 15 monitoring sites to conduct sampling on water quality parameters along the arroyo. The Technological Institute of Acuña (ITSA) and Ciudad Acuña sampled each section of the arroyo. Results yielded that the water is of good quality—no heavy metals were detected.

SEMAC also conducted an assessment of flora and fauna within the Arroyo Las Vacas. More than 441 species were identified. An enforcement surveillance program was created to identify environmental issues in the arroyo. Some of the issues that were identified included illegal discharges from mills, deforestation, extraction of rock material near the arroyo, and illegal dumping. Complaints were made to PROFEPA and other agencies.

Ciudad Acuña detected and eliminated sewer discharges to the arroyo from 33 sources. A reforestation program was implemented to rescue natural protected areas in the arroyo, and a former trash site was selected as an area for reforestation. A manual of the different species inhabiting the arroyo was drafted so residents can learn about the richness of the area.

The project was expanded to include a training on water quality monitoring. SEMAC partnered with TCEQ, IBWC, and CILA to organize the workshop in Amistad Dam. More than 14 representatives of water systems and natural protected areas learned about sampling techniques and procedures.

The next steps are to create a citizens forum with ITSA staff to monitor and denounce any pollution issues impacting the arroyo, and a response committee to follow up on any complaints with environmental agencies.

Dr. Carlos Rincon suggested drafting a report that would summarize accomplishments from the Arroyo Las Vacas project.

Eddie Moderow of TCEQ recognized the leadership and dedication of Alejandra Carrera on improving the water quality of Arroyo Las Vacas. This project is a model of binational collaboration. We look forward to collaborating with SEMAC on improving conditions in Arroyo Las Vacas, perhaps this can lead to the creation of a Coahuila rivers program similar to the Texas Clean Rivers Program.

Rosa Elvira Martinez of the Southwest Border Area Health Education Center (SBAHEC) discussed a promotora-led environmental education training on pesticide awareness and asthma triggers held in Maverick County. This is a project funded by the Border 2020 Program. It ended in November 2015.

The area health education center partnered with the UT school of Public Health, Texas Department of Health and Human Services (DSHS), Mexican Consulate and the Eagle Pass Independent School District (EPISD) for this project.

Staff visited three schools to train faculty and administrative staff on chemical exposures related to pesticide, mercury, lead and asthma triggers. More than 774 children and three teachers learned about prevention tools. Six promotoras were certified to train residents on exposures. They conducted visits to over 30 homes and pre-assessments to analyze chemicals used in each household, and post-assessments to identify changes in behavior patterns.

Kits were provided in case of a contingency at home. Staff also organized two cleanup campaigns in colonias near Elm Creek.

Dr. Carlos Rincon mentioned that a children's health workshop will take place in Harlingen. We will look for funding to organize a similar event in this area. Alejandra Carrera asked if training material was available online. Martinez mentioned that there is some information online, but will send her data by email.

Vanessa Rosales-Herrera (city of Eagle Pass) discussed the city of Eagle Pass Plastic Bag Ordinance.

The objectives of the ordinance are:

1. Protect the environment by reducing use of plastic bags
2. Protect life and property from flooding resulting from storm drainage obstructed by plastic bags
3. Protect fish, animals and rivers from the adverse effects of plastic bags
4. Promote the beautification of the city of Eagle Pass

The ordinance does not allow single-use carry out bags to be distributed. It does allow reusable carry out bags specifically designed and manufactured for multiple reuse.

Reusable carry out bags have to meet the following criteria:

- Display on the outside of the bag that it can be reused and recycled
- It has to be constructed out of cloth or other washable fabric or durable material whether it is woven or not woven
- It can be recyclable plastic that has a minimum thickness of 4 mills
- It can be recyclable paper with handles, if it's a bag smaller than 14 inches by height by 8 inches of width it is not required

The phase out period will be from April 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016. During this period commercial establishments within city limits shall notify their customers of the benefits of recycling and notify customers through signage of the phase out period. Beginning on January 1, 2017, no person or business establishment may provide any single-use carry out bags, but they are not forced to issue reusable bags; they can provide a bag for sale or for free.

Beginning on April 1, business establishments have to provide signage of the phase out period and it should include information about the benefits of reducing, reusing and recycling.

There are exemptions to the ordinance such as dry cleaning bags, newspaper bags, bags for pet waste, bags for medicine, for food, and bags inside business establishments—such as for flowers or fruits.

A five-member environmental advisory committee was formed to monitor the effects of the ordinance, troubleshoot any issues, and report back to city council. It will be comprised of two councilmen, two representatives of business establishments, and one member of the chamber of commerce. Unless extended by resolution, it will cease to exist on December 31, 2018.

The enforcement of the ordinance will be done by police or code enforcement officers or any city employee designated by the city manager. Here are the enforcement procedures when the ordinance is not followed:

1. The first violation will consist of a written warning
2. A second violation is subject to a \$100 fine
3. A third violation is subject to a \$200 fine and any subsequent violations will be \$500

Dr. Rincon asked if the city had a designated account or trust to finance other projects.

Hector Chavez mentioned that the fees will go to the city's general fund. The city is working on a proposed budget on how they are going to promote the ordinance in business establishments and among residents. The committee will work with city council on this issue.

Eglantina Canales mentioned that she was impressed with the ordinance and the provisions that were put in place. She asked if this information could be shared with ecology staff of border communities.

Alfredo Lucero (Director of Ecology in Piedras Negras) discussed a city-wide plastic bottle recycling program that the municipio started in 2015.

The objectives of the program are to promote awareness on the effects of material contained in plastic bottles in the stormwater system and beautify parks and green areas. Residents collect plastic bottles in exchange for basic consumer goods at lower costs. More than 7 tons or 950,000 plastic bottles have been recycled since the inception of the program, benefiting more than 5,300 families.

Can this program be continued if the administration changes in the next election cycle? Perhaps it could be a program that the state legislature would consider mandating at the state level.

Piedras Negras is also conducting bulk collection events in each city district and has just started a scrap tire and plastic bottle program aimed at promoting awareness on hazards associated with scrap tires and plastic material. It consists of children (ages 6 -13) working with city officials on picking up scrap tires and plastic bottles from vacant lots and streets. More than 130

children have enrolled in the program. Prizes will be awarded for the highest volume of scrap tires and plastic bottles collected.

The Secretariat of Environment in Coahuila (SEMAC) will be organizing a meeting with city officials and mayors of the coal region on April 29 in Ciudad Acuña, to discuss strategies on how to make solid waste collection systems more efficient by implementing recycling programs.

Eglantina Canales (Director of the Secretariat of Environment in Coahuila—SEMAC) presented on a used electronics project funded in this year's Border 2020 RFP.

The objectives of the project are to prevent the unauthorized disposal of used electronics in aquifers, vacant lots and landfills, promote sustainable management of used electronics, and strengthen strategies to recover materials than can be reused.

An assessment will be conducted with municipalities and recyclers to identify their training needs and organize workshops on the sustainable management of used electronics. The goal of the project is to collect more than 25 tons of used electronics and establish a used electronics storage facility.

The Secretariat of Environment in Coahuila signed an agreement with universities, the national chamber of industries, municipalities and a certified recycler for disposal services. Publications and other materials that will be used for the education component of the project are already available.

The project partners have identified temporary collection centers in municipalities and routes to pick up used electronics. Meetings were held to discuss strategies and assessments for the campaigns.

SEMAC will be using the logo of the state-wide used electronics initiative that it launched in municipalities along the state. The dates of the workshops and collection events were set. The first workshop was held on February 15-16, and the collection event on February 24-26; a second workshop was held on March 15 in Ciudad Acuña.

Surveys were distributed to over 60 people working in municipal departments and in the private sector, to assess their knowledge on hazards associated with used electronics and recycling tools. Three workshops were held in Acuña, Piedras Negras and Nava, with participation of over 150 people.

Outlets such as television, radio, newspapers and social media were used to promote the workshops. More than 46 public and private entities and municipalities attended a press conference to announce the project. The collection campaign on February 24-26 was held in Acuña, Nava and Piedras Negras, resulting in the participation of over 477 people and more than 13.5 tons of electronics and 242 TV sets collected.

A workshop was held with students of the Technological Institute in Acuña (ITSA) and other academic institutions on March 16. Participants exchanged ideas on designing slogans and strategies to promote future workshops. The next collection events will be held in June and October.

Victor Ibarra (Green Tec Osos--Technological Institute of Piedras Negras) presented on a project related to the integrated management of used electronics that the institute is coordinating under the Border 2020 Program.

There was an event in Piedras Negras on April 9 to officially start the project. The objectives of the project are to promote sustainable management of used electronics, and analyze their life cycle. This is a relevant issue because most electronics are sent to landfills or are illegally disposed at unauthorized sites. There are few certified recyclers that disassemble these components and determine their market value.

Staff designed the containers that are going to be used in future events. A three-ton tow truck will be used to pick up used electronics in every district of the city. There will be weekly events to collect electronics from residents. The Green Tec Osos group will be working with the public works department to organize events in Eagle Pass.

Staff will be conducting outreach in schools and shopping centers. A collection event will be held in April. The city of Eagle Pass Recycling Center will store electronics collected at the event. The goal of the project is to collect more than 50 tons between Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass. Publications, brochures and videos will be available for future workshops.

Ibarra announced that the municipio de Piedras Negras, the Technological Institute of Piedras Negras and Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF) will be organizing a used electronics symposium on May 27 and invited participants to the event.

There was a discussion on scrap tire issues. A representative of a tire disposal company shared his experience on exploring market alternatives for scrap tires. What is the best alternative?

Carlos Flores (Director of Ecology in Acuña) suggested doing an inventory of auto shops to determine the volume of scrap tires generated in their establishments. The ecology department requires auto shops to register the amount of tires in their facility.

If an inspection yields that there are fewer tires than the amount reported in the registration database, the business would face closure unless they comply with a requirement to cut the tires. This approach would make the business accountable for every tire they sell and store in their yard.

Dr. Rincon mentioned that EPA is analyzing a regional approach to manage scrap tires and underscored the importance of collaborating with non-profit entities and universities that are already exploring technologies to address this issue. The Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) has information on their website on studies that could serve as benchmarks to replicate projects in the region.

Waldo Terry of a non-profit organization presented recommendations to protect and preserve the stewardship of the Rio San Rodrigo. The river is a tributary of the Rio Grande. There are significant issues related to deforestation, and deterioration of its vegetation due to mining activities in the lower portion of the river.

Terry asked if the Rio San Rodrigo can be considered as an endangered river. Some of the recommendations that Terry proposed were:

- Establish an ecosystem restoration program and a sustainable ecological flow that would ensure compliance under the 1944 water treaty
- Monitor the allocation of water resources for irrigation
- Evaluate the operation of the Lafragua dam (which impounds the river).
- Suspend mining and rock quarry activities in urban areas. Consider alternatives to relocate mining facilities to areas away from the river

- Tell municipalities to stop awarding contracts or purchasing materials from companies that are not in compliance of environmental regulations
- Promote sustainable projects to improve the stewardship of the river

Perhaps we can conduct a project to restore wildlife and assess the water quality conditions of Rio San Rodrigo as it was done for the Arroyo Las Vacas.

Victor Ibarra mentioned that Green Tec Osos would be willing to work with The Rio San Rodrigo group on a future project.

There was a brief discussion on the projects in the Border 2020 Two Year Action Plan. The latest version can be found on the EPA's Border 2020 website: <https://www.epa.gov/border2020>

The meeting was adjourned.